

The Open Mike^{District 2}

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 3, Number 4

June / July 2007

A Moment at the Mike

Getting the Most for Your Money



Councilmember Mike Knapp

On May 24, the County Council completed action on Montgomery County's fiscal year 2008 budget. It was a long process, and I want to thank everyone -- whether you live in District 2 or not -- who contacted me to let me know their views, concerns, comments, and budget priorities. Hearing from you is one of the best ways I can ensure I'm working toward achieving a budget that really does represent the interests of the residents of this county.

The Council formally approved a [\\$4.1 billion operating budget for FY2008](#), which begins on July 1, 2007. This represents an increase of \$277 million over last year's funding level -- about seven percent higher than FY2007 -- and ensures the county continues to fund programs and services -- like [education](#), [public safety](#), [transportation](#), and services to the needy -- that you and other residents have indicated are the most critical. Residents of our county understand there is a cost associated with funding these programs, and one of my objectives during the budget debate was to ensure that your tax dollars were used responsibly to provide those programs and services in the most effective and efficient way possible.

In the area of education, the Council approved a final budget of \$1.981 billion for Montgomery County Public Schools, an increase of \$131.5 million over the FY2007 level. This amount also includes \$238.2 million for Montgomery College. As Chairman of the Council's Education Committee, I worked with my committee members to closely examine the Board of Education's initial budget request and ensure that the first thing we funded were the programs and initiatives that were having an immediate and direct impact on the classroom. We were not able to fund every initiative requested by the Board -- though we were able to fund more than 99 percent of it - - but we were able to focus our efforts on ongoing programs like class size reduction and all-day kindergarten, and even some new initiatives, such as middle school reform and a renewed focus on special education. As the year progresses, we will continue to focus on those activities and programs that increase academic achievement and increase opportunities for success for all students.

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FY2008 Budget Highlights

Tax Relief

- To comply with the County Charter limit on property tax revenue, every owner-occupied principal residence will receive a \$613 property tax credit. Residences assessed up to \$475,200—about 80 percent of the total—will receive lower County property tax bills in FY2008 than in FY2007 (8.2 percent lower for a house assessed for \$275,000 in FY2008).
- The County “circuit breaker” homeowners’ tax credit will provide significant property tax relief for homeowners of all ages with household incomes of \$64,000 or less (relief that is likely to average \$685 per house for eligible homeowners).
- Under a law the Council passed last year, eligible homeowners who are at least 70 years old will receive an added 25 percent circuit breaker credit.



Education

- \$1.981 billion for Montgomery County Public Schools, an increase of \$131.5 million, or 7 percent, over the FY2007 adopted budget.
- \$238.2 million for Montgomery College, an increase of 9.1 percent over FY2007 levels.
- \$3.57 million to lease, purchase, move and rehabilitate relocatable classrooms needed for the 2007-08 school year. These funds include the moving of 30 relocatable classrooms and replacement of nine.
- \$400,000 in a community grant for the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL), formerly the Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (MCALESOL). The program promotes English literacy.
- \$245,000 to support a community-based pre-kindergarten pilot program that would support 40 children for a half-year, beginning in January.
- \$40,000 for transportation for children in foster care.
- \$1.5 million for the new Cafritz Foundation Art Center of Montgomery College in Silver Spring. The building will house the School of Art and Design.
- \$2.5 million to open the Goldenrod Building adjacent to the Germantown campus of Montgomery College. The building will be used for classes and offices and will house the Office of Economic Development’s Germantown business incubator.



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Budget Highlights *continued from page 2*

- \$450,000 for Montgomery College for the addition of 10 full-time faculty members.
- Full funding for all MCPS Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) requests including:
 - Poolesville High School laboratory upgrades and addition (\$7.75 million).
 - \$96,000 in matching dollars for stadium lighting at Clarksburg High School.
 - Approved \$1.2 million for MCPS to bring nearly 300 stormwater management facilities up to current standards.

Public Safety

- \$218.9 million for the Police Department (an increase of 7.3 percent over the approved FY2007 budget), including \$1.8 million to add 30 new police patrol officers.
- \$373,190 for six officers assigned to the centralized Gang Unit. These positions were grant-funded in FY2007 and will be grant funded for about half of the FY2008 year.
- \$30,000 to continue funding for a Community Outreach Coordinator for the International Corridor C-SAFE program.
- \$189.3 million for the Fire and Rescue Service (an increase of 6.4 percent over FY2007).
- Add 70 new full-time positions and one part-time position to the Fire and Rescue Service.
- \$127,000 to add two assistant state's attorneys to prosecute crimes committed by identified gang members.
- \$4.2 million for 22 new positions for Fire Safety Code Enforcement.
- \$450,000 for four-person staffing on four fire engines starting in June 2008.
- \$178,000 for a half-year EMS flex unit for the Fire and Rescue Service.



Transportation

- Will buy 31 small diesel buses, completing the three-year program to replace this portion of the Ride On fleet.
- Will replace 27 regular size Ride On buses. After these purchases, 38 percent of the fleet will be fueled by compressed natural gas, hybrid diesel/electricity or 'clean' diesel by January 2009 (compared to 27 percent of the current fleet).
- \$150,000 to increase the value of coupon books to \$120 per month (from the current \$112) for the Call-'N'-Ride transportation subsidy program for low income seniors (age 67 and over) and low-income individuals with disabilities. To qualify, an individual must earn \$25,000 or less. Program goes in effect in January 2008.

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Budget Highlights *continued from page 3*

- \$552,000 to allow seniors and individuals with disabilities to ride free on Ride On and Metrobus (in Montgomery County) at all times (starting in January 2008).
- \$1 million additional (for a total of \$2 million) to improve access to bus stops.
- \$300,000 additional for resurfacing of neighborhood streets.
- \$162,000 additional for street tree maintenance that would provide for emergency trimming needs, and \$1 million to the CIP for street tree preservation (proactively trimming trees in neighborhoods).
- \$80,000 to double the rate of installation of pedestrian countdown signals at County maintained intersections. An increase of this rate for each of the next five years would install countdown signals at every County intersection.
- \$772,000 additional to the CIP for further enhancements on construction of Glenmont Metro Station Parking Garage. This will allow for 1,200 cars to park on the west side of Georgia Avenue



Economic Development

- \$802,440 for the Economic Development Fund that loans funds to small businesses.
- \$600,000 for the Germantown Innovation Center, including \$250,000 for the Germantown Incubator.
- \$325,000 to CIP for the Life Sciences and Technology Centers project to develop land use plans for the Germantown Life Sciences Park and the East County Center for Science and Technology.
- \$50,000 to place 40 youth from the Germantown, Silver Spring and Wheaton areas into summer employment. The target population is low and moderate income youth, ages 14-21.

Health and Human Services

Aging and Disability Services

- \$8.1 million to pay supplements to 26 nonprofit organizations that serve adults with developmental disabilities, an increase of \$664,000 over FY2007.
- \$105,000 to fund an Adult Day Care pilot program that will enable families/caregivers to enroll elderly individuals in a community-based adult day care program.

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Budget Highlights *continued from page 4*

- \$5.1 million for In-Home Aide services to provide services to homebound individuals who need assistance with the basic activities of daily living and frail or disabled adults who need assistance with chore activities.

Public Health Services

- \$11.4 million for the Montgomery Cares Program, an increase of 14.7 percent over the FY2007 approved budget, to provide primary and preventive health care to low-income, uninsured residents.
- \$18.1 million for School Health Services, an increase of \$1.8 million over FY2007, to implement a negotiated increase in hours and days for Community Health Nurses and School Health Room Aides.
- \$5.6 million for Women's Health Services (an increase of \$1.9 million) for providing prenatal, labor and delivery and maternity dental services to low-income, uninsured women.

Children, Youth and Family Services

- \$5.16 million for Linkages to Learning, including an increase of \$830,000 to continue Linkages at all of its current sites.
- \$19.2 million for Child Welfare Services.
- \$11.5 million for Child Care Subsidies.
- More than \$2 million to fund a range of activities associated with the County's Youth Violence and Gang Prevention Initiative, including a new Wellness Center at Northwood High School; wrap-around services for youth involved in or at-risk of gang involvement in the Germantown, Wheaton, and Silver Spring areas; and a new position dedicated to outreach to girls involved in or at-risk of involvement in gang activity.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services

- \$253,130 to expand the County's Mobile Crisis Team to 24 hours a day, seven days per week coverage. The Mobile Crisis Team is available to respond to crisis situations, in conjunction with Montgomery County Police, for any County resident in need of immediate intervention.
- More than \$10 million in shelter and housing stabilization services to provide temporary shelter to homeless families, emergency shelter beds for homeless adults and intake and assessment for households who are experiencing a housing-related emergency.
- \$3.27 million for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, an increase of nearly \$250,000, to provide comprehensive mental health services to children, youth, and their families.

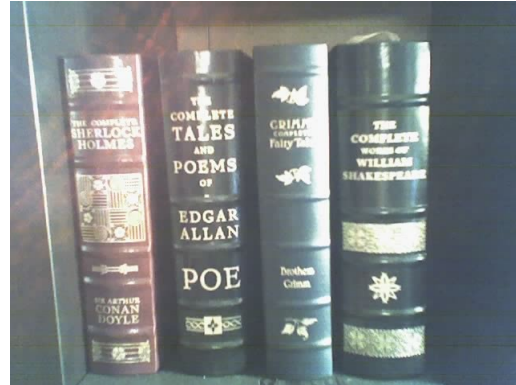
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Budget Highlights *continued from page 5*

- \$2.2 million for Special Needs Housing (an increase of \$1.2 million) to provide housing subsidies and service coordination for special needs populations and people who are homeless.

Libraries

- \$40.5 million for the Department of Public Libraries, an increase of \$2.1 million over the FY2007 approved budget.
- \$93,440 to expand Sunday library hours by one hour per Sunday at each of the eight branches with Sunday service. This will increase hours overall by about 260 hours.
- \$228,000 to purchase a variety of new materials for general users, new Americans, seniors, teens and students, bringing materials budget to a total of \$6.3 million.
- \$62,020 for additional staff for the new Germantown and Rockville libraries.



Arts and Humanities

- \$5.4 million for the Arts and Humanities Council.
- \$500,000 for the American Film Institute in Silver Spring.
- \$600,000 to help retire facility debt for the Imagination Stage.
- \$100,000 for Heritage Tourism Alliance that helps the County use its heritage to encourage tourism while protecting and promoting its cultural, historical and natural resources.

Environment

- Recommended that beginning in FY2008, DPWT should replace all administrative sedans, 4x4 vehicles and SUVs with hybrid vehicles.
- \$7.5 million in the CIP for development of a new landfill gas-to-energy facility.
- Changed how townhouses will be categorized for purposes of the leaf vacuuming charge, moving them from the more expensive single-family category to the less expensive multi-family category.

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Budget Highlights *continued from page 6*

- Continued the expanded hours (seven days a week, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.) for the household hazardous waste disposal program at the Shady Grove Transfer Station. Three years ago, the hours were limited to four days a week.
- \$141,350 in the Water Quality Protection Fund for the phase in of structural maintenance of MCPS' stormwater management facilities by DEP.

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

- \$133 million for the budget of M-NCPPC, an increase of \$14.1 million over FY2007.
- Supported the reorganization into separate Parks and Planning Departments and reorganization within the Department of Parks to improve management.
- Supported accelerating the design for the Germantown Town Center Urban Park so the design of the park can occur at the same time as the design of Locbury Drive, which will cross the park. Design will begin in FY2008.
- Supported the acceleration of master plans and provided increased funding for forest conservation implementation (plan review and inspection), zoning ordinance reform and the initiation of a new Geographic Information System (GIS) strategic plan.

Recreation

- \$100,000 to cover half of the cost for senior adult mini-trips, an increase of \$19,000 over FY2007.
- \$13,000 for the therapeutic recreation program at the Inwood House.
- \$320,000 to enhance the five Neighborhood Centers (Clara Barton, Good Hope, Plum Gar, Ross Boddy and Scotland) with minor facility improvements and the replacement of interior furniture and equipment.
- \$105,970 to add an UpCounty Sports Academy beginning at mid-year. The academy will be held at Seneca Valley high school and operate three days per week.

Other Notable Items

- \$1.6 million for a total of 52 grants to nonprofit organizations to support a variety of programs and services.
- \$12,060 to fund approximately 27 scholarships for middle school girls to attend an information technology camp at Montgomery College during the summer.
- Approved 6.5 percent average water and sewer rate increase for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. Rejected requested increase of \$4 per quarter in WSSC Ready to Serve Charge (account maintenance fee), pending further review of ways to address WSSC's infrastructure maintenance needs.
- \$25,000 to the CIP for a study of pedestrian linkages to the Clarksburg historic area.

Next Town Meeting Set for June 20 in Olney

The Montgomery County Council will continue its efforts to find out what issues most concern the residents of the County when it hosts a Town Hall Meeting for the Brookeville, Olney and Sandy Spring areas at the Longwood Recreation Community Center on Wednesday, June 20, starting at 8 p.m. A pre-meeting reception will begin at 7:30 p.m.

The Longwood Recreation Community Center is located at 19300 Georgia Avenue in Brookeville. For more information on the center, [click here](#).

Money *continued from page 1*

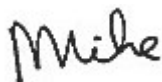
While making our way through the budget process, I worked diligently to make certain that the budget focuses on the long-term picture. This required ensuring funds and resources for the programs and services we want to provide in FY2008, and also in the years to come. Funding the County's essential—or critical—programs, some of which we are required to fund by law, means that we were not always able to provide funding increases to all government programs and services. Therefore, it was essential that the Council, and our government agencies, set priorities for the programs and services that are important to the County and its residents.

As a result of [legislation that I introduced](#) and the Council unanimously approved two years ago, the Council and all county government agencies are required to set priorities and performance measures for their programs. This allows us to measure a program's results and guarantee that your money is being used appropriately.

On the whole, I'm pleased with the final budget. We were not only able to fund our most important programs, but were also able to provide residents with some additional tax relief. For example, every owner-occupied principal residence will receive a property tax credit of \$613, the third straight year we've provided property owners with some form of tax relief. We also included another "circuit breaker" homeowners' tax credit to provide property tax relief for our county's poorest homeowners.

Your comments have been invaluable to me during the budget process, and I believe we've provided you with a budget that reflects your best interests, and which you can afford. Highlights of the FY2008 budget appear just below. If you need additional information -- or if there's anything else I can do to help -- [send me a message](#) or give me a call at (240) 777-7955. It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,



Mike Knapp
Councilmember, District 2

County Council Approves Knapp Housing Initiative

Provides Funding to Assist County Employees in Home Purchase

I am pleased to announce that, at my request, the County Council was able to set aside \$1 million in the Housing Initiative Fund to help Montgomery County employees purchase a home in FY2008. As part of my proposal, I recommended that the County participate in two programs—*Maryland's House Keys for Employees Program* (HKFE) and an *Employee Down-Payment/Closing Cost Assistance Program*.

HKFE is administered by More House 4 Less and the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Through the program, the State will match contributions dollar-for-dollar, up to \$5,000, toward down payment and closing costs from participating employers. The match is in the form of a zero percent deferred loan, which is repayable upon sale or transfer of the home or at the time of payoff or refinancing.



There are a number of requirements, set by the State, which an employee must meet in order to be eligible for the program. They include a maximum income requirement ranging from \$92,106 to \$105,651, depending on family size, and a maximum acquisition cost of \$429,620. Other requirements can be found at <http://www.morehouse4less.com/>.

The Employee Down Payment/Closing Cost Assistance program would offer county employees a secured, low interest second mortgage loan equal to five percent of the purchase price, up to \$20,000, for assistance with a down payment and/or closing costs.

Requirements of the program, such as maximum income and acquisition costs, will be defined with assistance from the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Housing Opportunities Commission.

County employees that would be eligible for the programs include those from Montgomery County Government, employees and volunteers of the Local Fire and Rescue Departments, Montgomery County Police, Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, the Housing Opportunities Commission, and the Montgomery County Division of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Other employers in the county and state are already offering similar programs. As an employer, the county must do everything it can to stay competitive and retain the best and brightest employees, as well as assist our employees in being able to live where they work.

The *House Keys for Employees* program is open to all employers in Maryland. I urge all of you that own a business in the County to participate in the program, and assist your employees in purchasing a home in the county they serve. If you would like more information about participating in the program or have questions regarding the program please send me an [e-mail](#). And stay tuned to *The Open Mike* for information regarding when and how to apply for these programs. I will be sure to send out the information as soon as it becomes available

Chairman's Corner

Ed Committee Examines Financial Management, Incident Reporting



Even as the school year winds to a close, the Education Committee remains hard at work, and will continue to meet regularly throughout the summer. One of the more interesting discussions we'll be having involves the reporting of "serious incidents" in county schools. We expect schools to be safe havens for teaching and learning -- and for the most part, they are - but what happens when crime, violence, or disruptive behavior occurs on campus? As a parent, what can you expect your child's school to do? How would you be notified of such an incident? And what sort of incident qualifies as "serious" in the first place?

Last fall, the Office of Legislative Oversight delivered to the Council OLO Report 2007-1, "Review of Montgomery County Public Schools' 'Serious Incident' Reporting." As part of this report, OLO examined Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) policies and practices for identifying, tracking, and reporting information about serious incidents that occur on MCPS sites. OLO also examined national research on school safety, reviewed MCPS policies for reporting and recording information about incidents, and compared research on how other states and school systems collect and report such data.

When the Education Committee began its review of this report last year and discussed it with representatives of MCPS and the Board of Education, one of our recommendations at that time was that the Board and MCPS adopt an action plan for preparation, use, and public release of a school safety report. We asked that such a report be easily understood and reliable, so that parents and educators will have the information needed to ensure a safe learning environment. Working with stakeholders, MCPS is in the process of completing this report, and anticipates having something to submit to the school board in the fall.

Future committee meetings will feature ongoing budget discussions, including quarterly financial reports from MCPS. The committee will spend a good deal of its time this summer looking at both the operating and capital budgets for MCPS. I'll have more information as things develop, so keep watching this space for updates.

Education Committee Schedule

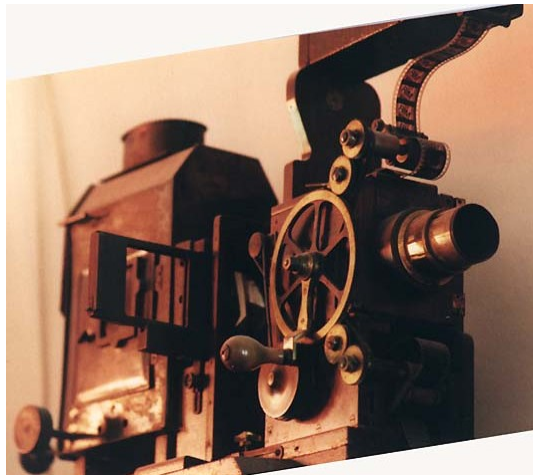
The information is subject to change, so please check the Council's website as dates near for updated information. Unless otherwise indicated, all committee meetings will convene in the 7th Floor hearing room of the Council Office Building.

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
June 25	9:30 a.m.	- Update - Financial Management System Implementation - Discussion: Reporting capabilities of new Financial Management System
July 2	9:30 a.m.	- Quarterly Financial Status Report from MCPS - Briefing on Thornton Funding - Discussion: MCPS Operating Budget
July 16	9:30 a.m.	- Briefing on No Child Left Behind - Briefing on HSA Requirements - Briefing on Higher Education in Montgomery County
July 30	9:30 a.m.	- Briefing on MCPS Infrastructure Plan

Knapp Pushes for Captioned Films in Germantown

Germantown Regal Now Provides Open Captioned Films for Deaf Patrons

Last year, I was contacted by Judy Stout, a deaf Upcounty resident who pointed out to me that there were no mainstream movie theaters in the Upcounty that showed captioned films. Given that the Upcounty lies about halfway between the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick and Columbia, and Galludet in Washington, D.C., our region is home to many deaf and hard of hearing residents. It seemed to make sense that at least one mainstream theater in our area show captioned films -- the closest theaters doing so at that time were in Rockville -- and Ms. Stout asked if it might be possible to bring captioned films to the Germantown Regal cinema at Germantown Center.



I contacted the Germantown Regal to learn more about their existing accommodations and whether the current sound system could be modified for captioning. Like most Regal Theaters, the Germantown Regal did provide headsets for the hearing impaired, giving these patrons the opportunity to receive amplified audio that makes the soundtrack more audible. This is the same technology that provides "descriptive audio" for blind or visually impaired patrons. However, the theater did not provide subtitled films for those who might be completely deaf.

I wrote to the management of the [Regal Entertainment Group](#) in Tennessee to bring this matter to their attention, and asked whether

it might be possible to modify the existing sound system to allow for captioned films. Earlier this year, I was informed by Regal that it would soon be modifying the sound system at the Germantown Regal to make captioning possible.

I'm pleased to report that personal captioning is now available at the Germantown Regal on a daily basis for a variety of movies and times. For specific times and showings with personal captioning, you can call the theatre at (301) 916-9235. A number of movie ticket websites, such as [this listing for the Germantown Regal at fandango.com](#), also indicate which films are captioned. The Germantown Regal is located at 20000 Century Blvd, in Germantown Center.

My thanks to the management of the Germantown Regal, and the Regal Entertainment Group, for making this accommodation possible -- and to Upcounty resident Judy Stout for asking the question in the first place.

Contact Me!

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Council Bans Trans Fats in Restaurants, Markets

On May 15, the Montgomery County Council unanimously voted to ban trans fats for most foods sold in County restaurants and at prepared food sections of supermarkets. Through this resolution, Montgomery County seeks to help promote healthy and safe eating habits as trans fats are responsible for raising LDL ("bad") cholesterol and lowering HDL ("good") cholesterol, which contribute to heart disease and obesity.

The elimination of trans fats begins on January 1, 2008 for oils, shortenings and margarines with artificial trans fats that are used for frying or in spreads, and on January 1, 2009, for oils and shortenings used for deep frying of yeast dough or cake batter, and all other foods containing trans fat. In some cases, waivers may be granted to January 1, 2010, for prepackaged foods that are sold in restaurants.

Although we are the first county to set in place such a decision, this action reflects a nationwide trend, as a [similar resolution was enacted by the New York City Health Department](#) in December 2006. Many commercial chains are also banning trans fats such as [Marriott International](#), [Ruby Tuesday](#), [Legal Seafood](#), [Wendy's](#), [Taco Bell](#), [Kentucky Fried Chicken](#), [Au Bon Pain](#), [Panera Bread](#), and [California Pizza Kitchen](#).

Information, Please!

What The Heck Is A Trans Fat Anyway?

Trans Fat -- also known as trans fatty acid -- is an unhealthy substance made through the chemical process of hydrogenation of oils. Hydrogenation solidifies liquid oils and increases the shelf life and the flavor stability of oils and foods that contain them. Trans fat is found in vegetable shortenings and in some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods and other foods.

Trans fats wreak havoc with the body's ability to regulate cholesterol. In the hierarchy of fats, the polyunsaturated fats which are found in vegetables are the good kind; they lower your cholesterol. Saturated fats have been condemned as the bad kind. But trans fats are far worse. They drive up the [LDL](#) ("bad") cholesterol, which markedly increases the risk of coronary artery heart disease and [stroke](#).

According to a recent study of some 80,000 women, for every 5% increase in the amount of saturated [fat](#) a woman consumes, her risk of heart disease increases by 17%. But only a 2% increase in trans fats will increase her risk of heart disease by 93%.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (200g)	
Servings per container 2	
Amount per serving	
Calories 220	Calories from Fat 100
%	
Total Fat 12g	
Saturated Fat 3g	
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 30 mg	
Sodium 235 mg	
Total Carbohydrate 16g	
Dietary Fiber 5g	
Sugars 4g	
Protein 6 g	
Vitamin A	
Citamin C	
Calcium	

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

The US [FDA](#) in 1999 proposed that the Nutrition Facts labels on vegetable shortenings and some cookies, crackers, margarines, and other foods may soon carry information about trans fatty acids, or trans fats. Beyond requiring that some labels list the amount of trans fats in the food, the [FDA](#) rule would also define the term "trans fat free" and limits the use of certain nutrient or health claims related to fat content, such as "lean" and "low saturated fat."

In the realm of dietary dangers, trans fats rank very high. It has been estimated that trans fats are responsible for some 30,000 early deaths a year in the United States. Worldwide the toll of premature deaths is in the millions. (*Information courtesy of [MedicineNet.com](#).*)

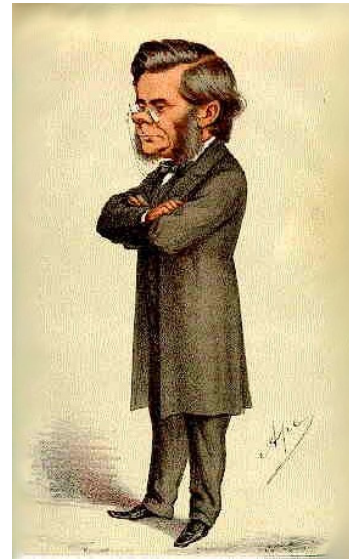
The Upcounty Road Scholar

Repairs Slated in Brookmead, but a *mea culpa* on Sweepstakes

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highways Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of The Open Mike provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community.



Got question or suggestion about road repairs in your area? [E-mail the Road Scholar](#) and let us know.

Department of Public Works and Transportation

Traffic Light Timing at Liberty Mill Road and Dawson Farm Road: After receiving reports from frustrated drivers regarding the timing of the stoplights at this intersection, I asked DPWT to look into the vehicle sensors in all directions. DPWT confirms that several vehicle sensors are damaged and in need of replacement. A work order will be issued to replace the damaged sensors. At the moment, there are 16 intersections in the county that are in need of sensor replacement.

Surface Integrity on Sweepstakes Road: I was extremely disappointed with the condition of this Damascus road, which was only just recently resurfaced, and asked DPWT to determine whether the initial resurfacing was of sufficient quality. Residents have rightly pointed out that the road is already pocked with potholes and is deteriorating in several places. DPWT acknowledged that the sub-base of the road has failed and that it is investigating the possibility of a Capital Improvements Project for reconstruction of the road -- an initiative I will support, though I must strongly question why this project was not completed correctly the first time. Highway Maintenance has indicated that it *can* provide temporary repairs to the road, but that such repairs will neither provide substantial improvement, nor will they be long lasting. "We are very sorry about the current deterioration," DPWT director Art Holmes told me, "and will take steps to retain its viability as long as possible."

Let's hope so.

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Find and Visit a Farmers Market in Your Community

One of the real benefits of living in the Upcounty is that we're near -- or even in -- Montgomery County's 93,000 acre Agricultural Reserve. We're fortunate to have so much farming going on in the area, because it means we not only get the spectacular views of working farms as we drive along the back roads, but also because we have the opportunity to purchase locally-grown fruits, vegetables and other products that haven't been sitting on the back of a truck for weeks on end getting here.

Our county is home to countless farmers markets, selling a wide variety of goods from strawberries to hay to beef. And if you're worried it's difficult to find one in our sprawling county, help has arrived. The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development has a website devoted to farmers markets, available at:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agstmpl.asp?url=/Content/DED/AgServices/agfarmersmarkets.asp>

Road Scholar *continued from page 13*

Drainage at Brookeville Road and Georgia Avenue: Ongoing work on the drainage system along this road has frustrated area residents and drivers for months. I asked DPWT for an update on progress toward completing the work, and was informed that the drainage system at this intersection is undergoing engineering analysis. Once the investigative work is completed, repairs to the drain will take place, and the road will be repaired. "We regret that this could not have been accomplished sooner," Art Holmes said, "but we have been resolving these issues in turn and will complete the improvement as soon as we possibly can."

Pedestrian Safety along White Ground Road (Boyd's): Speeding remains a constant concern to residents (and especially walkers) in the Boyd's area. DPWT has indicated that it will study speeding on White Ground Road, and will let me know of the results. On a related issue, the Highway Maintenance Section will inspect the culverts alongside the road to ensure they are functioning properly.

Road Repairs in Brookmead Subdivision: DPWT informs me that the Brookmead subdivision is scheduled for resurfacing during the current construction season -- welcome news, I'm certain, to this Darnestown community.

Four Way Stop Sign at Celebration Way and Town Center Drive (Germantown): Residents, walkers, and readers who use the new Germantown Library have pointed out that traffic at this intersection can be particularly crazy -- a number of near-misses have already been reported. I asked DPWT to look into a four-way stop at this intersection (as opposed to the two-way stop presently located there). DPWT has initiated a study to determine whether an all-way stop is warranted, or whether additional improvements may be necessary at the intersection.

Repairs to Game Preserve Road: Residents have reported a number of problems with visibility and conditions on this narrow residential street. DPWT informed me that it has entered service requests for pothole and shoulder repair, and block pruning will also be scheduled. The narrow, winding, rural nature of the road, DPWT says, makes improving visibility somewhat difficult: "Improvements to the configuration of the road, which is the only permanent mechanism through which to improve the sight distance, would require a realignment and reconstruction of the road."

New Funding, Video for Pedestrian Safety at MCPS Schools

The first \$25,000 in net revenues received under the County's new speed camera program will be earmarked for pedestrian safety improvements at public schools. This additional funding will allow the County to accelerate planned safety improvements by one to two years for one to two County schools. Engineering changes that increase school safety include improvements to signs, sidewalks, drop-off and pickup areas and crosswalks.

Additionally, Honda of North America, Inc. has very generously donated 400 copies of a 14-minute DVD on pedestrian safety called "Step to Safety with ASIMO." The DVD, aimed at 5-to-9 year-olds, is going to every public and private K-5 school in Montgomery County, and every County library will receive two copies of the DVD. The video is also available for viewing online here: <http://asimo.honda.com/SafetyVideo.aspx>

Montgomery County is also being awarded a Safe Routes to School grant. The \$139,200 received under this grant will be used to hire a full-time coordinator for the program. The County recently submitted a Safe Routes to School grant application to the State of Maryland to fund pedestrian safety improvements at 11 schools in fiscal year 2008. If the County is approved for the grant, funding will begin in October.

For more information, visit the County's pedestrian safety website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/walk.

Fore!

Montgomery County Golf Taking Tee Times Online



Montgomery County Golf -- the county agency responsible for maintaining and administering Montgomery County's nine public golf courses -- has launched a new and considerably improved website to not only provide information on the county's golf courses, but also to -- at last -- give golfers the ability to reserve tee times online for any County course.

The new website, at <http://www.montgomerycountygolf.com/>, responds to the long-standing demand from county golfers to provide a mechanism for making tee times online. "Our golfers have requested online tee time reservations," Montgomery Golf Executive Director Keith Miller reported, "and we are thrilled to now be able to provide that option." I agree -- and I think any golfer will appreciate the ease and functionality of the new web-based service.

But there's more. The website also includes detailed information on all nine county courses, including interactive maps that provide tips from the pros on how to master each hole. Wondering how to approach the green on Little Bennett's 543-yard second hole? The interactive map can tell you ("Stay to the left side on your second shot for a clear view"). It's a nifty feature that duffers and non-duffers alike will find both useful and entertaining.

[Explore the Montgomery Golf website](#), find a course you like, examine each hole closely, and then make your tee time. And if you'd still like a hardcopy guide to the county's courses to keep in your golf bag, you can download the *Montgomery County 2007 Golf Guide* there, too.

Metro Funding Bill Introduced in U.S. Senate

Maryland, Virginia Delegations Sponsor Bill for Metro Improvements, Reform

As longtime readers of *The Open Mike* know, I consider our region's growing transportation needs to be one of the most significant and important challenges facing our county. As Vice Chair of the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#), and a member of the [Transportation Planning Board](#), the federally-mandated body responsible for transportation planning in the Greater Washington region, one of the major challenges I've been working to address is ensuring a vibrant Metro system.

Even the most jaded Upcounty resident -- for we live in an area where getting to the nearest Metro still involves a long hike to Shady Grove -- will likely acknowledge that Metro remains one of the most important parts of our region's transportation infrastructure. It's important, therefore, that we ensure it continues to meet our needs well into the future. I think we can move closer to making that vision a reality if we can prove we can take good care of the system we already have, then work to expand it. To that end, as a member of COG, the TPB -- but mostly as a Councilmember and Upcounty resident -- I'm pleased to report that some help is on the way.

Maryland Senators [Ben Cardin](#) and [Barbara Mikulski](#), with the sponsorship of Virginia Senators [John Warner](#) and [James Webb](#), have introduced [S. 1446](#) in the U.S. Senate, asking the federal government to commit \$1.5 billion for Metro capital improvements over the next ten years, provided that the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia also provide financial support. With such increased funding, there would also be an improved oversight mechanism to ensure these funds are used effectively to improve all aspects of our transit system.

Similar legislation was introduced by the Maryland and Virginia delegations last year, but didn't pass -- and at the local level, only Washington, D.C., formally approved legislation to provide Metro with a dedicated funding stream. A number of Maryland State Delegates and Senators -- such as Senators Kramer and Hogan, and Delegates Hixson, Montgomery and Barkley -- worked hard, though unsuccessfully, last year to pass legislation to fund Metro and other forms of mass transit. I'm hopeful similar efforts will be better received during the next legislative session. To that end, I encourage you to [contact the Governor](#) or your State legislators to let them know your views on dedicated funding for Metro.

Ride On Now Accepting SmarTrip Cards



[SmarTrip cards](#) are now usable on Montgomery County [Ride On buses](#), making county bus transportation even easier. SmarTrip cards, first introduced into the metro transportation system through MetroRail, MetroBus, and parking at metro, make public transportation easier by eliminating the need to carry cash, tokens, farecards, or special passes.

Although SmarTrip cards do not yet compute multiple trip discounts for frequent passengers of Ride On, Metro hopes to introduce those card capabilities by next year. Metro reports that in the last six months, about half of the 2.3 million cards purchased since their introduction in 1999 have been used. So next time you take advantage of the Ride On system, bring your SmarTrip card for a faster, easier experience.

For more information on Ride On, go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov/RideOn, or call the County's Transit Information Center at 240-777-RIDE (7433). For more information about SmarTrip, customers can call 1-888-SMARTRIP (762-7874) weekdays from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Information, Please!

How To Properly Dispose of Worn Out American Flags

Each year, around the Fourth of July, I receive questions about how to properly dispose of worn out American flags. It's a good question. The only guidance provided by federal law is found in the United States Code at Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8(k), which reads, in its entirety:

"The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

Many of us, however, are still uncomfortable with the idea of burning a flag, wondering if we're doing so in a way that is properly "dignified." Fortunately, there is some help available.

Many units of the American Legion provide suitably respectful ceremonies for the disposal of worn flags. In fact, many American Legions perform the ceremony on Flag Day. [Click here](#) to find an American Legion near you -- then check with them to see if they dispose of old flags.

You can also find more information at the American Legion website by [clicking here](#), and at the Veterans of Foreign Wars website by [clicking here](#).

Celebrate the Fourth in Montgomery County

Montgomery County -- born in 1776, the same year as American Independence -- takes the Fourth of July seriously! If you're looking to save yourself the time and stress of traveling to the District for Washington, D.C.'s own admittedly spectacular fireworks show, you can find fantastic fireworks and a really good time right here in your own back yard. At press time, *The Open Mike* was aware of the following Fourth of July celebrations. If you're interested in any event, please call to verify start times, as well as the times fireworks will begin.

Event	Start Time	Location
Germantown Glory	4:00 p.m.	South Germantown Park 14501 Schaeffer Road, in Boyds (240) 777-6820
Gaithersburg	5:00 p.m.	Montgomery County Fairgrounds 16 Chestnut Street, in Gaithersburg (301) 258-6350
Kensington	7:30 p.m.	Albert Einstein High School 11135 Newport Mill Road, in Kensington
Rockville	7:00 p.m.	Montgomery College, Rockville Campus 51 Mannakee Street, in Rockville (parking available at Rockville Town Center)
Takoma Park	9:30 p.m.	Takoma Park Middle School 7611 Piney Branch Road, in Takoma Park (301) 270-6876

Vox Pops**Voices From Around the Upcounty Community**

A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny . . . but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.

**Germantown? Make that 'Germ-town'!**

"Could you please tell me why builders are going about the uglification of Germantown? When we first moved here a year ago we marvelled at the open spaces and how uncluttered everything was. That began to end before the year was up. On the corner of Crystal Rock and 118, where the Taco Bell is, there was a small grassy space which is now being jammed with a bank. Why do we need another bank when there seems to be one on every corner? On the other side of the street, behind another complex, jammed on another small piece of land, another office building is going up. It looks so ugly. I don't understand why the zoning commission or whoever governs these things is allowing such unsightly building. I know it's the right of the landowner to do what he wants with the land if he can get the permits, but still. There is a vacant building down the way which could have been used for a new office building, so I just can't understand why buildings are being jammed on every piece of land there is. Rockville now looks like an unholy, motly mess, with some gorgeous buildings and some concrete monsters. Please, don't let this happen to Germantown, while there is still a town left to speak of.

"Having lived down county where I used to think all the amenities were, I didn't think I could ever take living in Germtown as we called it, but it turns out we really love it. There's more than enough here, especially with the opening of the huge new library, book stores, and some other amenities that we really don't need to go down county. But please, couldn't you keep an eye on some of what is becoming eyesores? That new office building will look right into the windows of the homes of the people it is behind! I know that these places may bring new tax revenue and jobs to the area, and I don't mean to try and squelch that, I just want the area to retain its charm and its openness and not become another Rockville, emphasis on rock." -- Jan

Going Ape Over Armani

"I am a caretaker of a non-human primate and I am outraged at how this case with Armani is being handled. I can not believe that we call ourselves the land of the free when someone can come into our homes and rip a family member out and place them where ever they want without regards to what is in their best interest. And yes I said family member, I'm sure that some of the animal activists cringe when they hear that . . . I have heard from people who know [the monkey's owner] that Armani had a very good home with her. I can only imagine what he's going through being taken from his environment and placed in a zoo. To me that's the equivalent of taking a 5 year old child in kindergarten and putting them out in the work force. . . . I personally believe these animal activists take things way too far, they, in my mind, are terrorists. I am willing to bet they own dogs and cats themselves and how would they feel if we came in, took them away and put them in a shelter. Please help get Armani back to his safe and loving home with his family where he belongs!!" -- Sandi

continued on page 19

Vox Pops *continued from page 18*

County Fifth Graders Standing Up for the Homeless

"We 5th grade students at Somerset Elementary School have many concerns about the homeless of Montgomery County. . . We think it is very important to do something about the growing number of homeless. The more we do to help these less fortunate people, the closer we will get to solve the problem."



"At the beginning of the school year our school walked and chanted for the homeless. Our class did the coat drive, where we raked leaves or walked dogs to earn money to buy homeless children 'new coats.' We did something called the 'Caring Cart' where we decorated a shopping cart and every morning we asked classes if they had brought in items to help the homeless. At the end of two weeks, we went to two shelters and donated our supplies. We made posters and we did reports on these unfortunate people. All of our actions greatly benefited the shelters we delivered the supplies to. This is the 20th year of Mrs. Fisk's program to help the homeless in our county."

"We learned a lot about the homeless and how underprivileged they are compared to us. There are so many causes that would make a person lose a home or not be able to get one. . . . When we went to the shelters, we were stunned. We would have never imagined how they lived with no privacy. The only people at Chase Partnership in a room with a door were the people that were working. The time has come for us to take action and start taking steps to stop homelessness." --
Fifth Grade Students at Somerset Elementary School, Chevy Chase

Contact Me!

I always welcome your views and comments, whether in person, electronically, or by phone. Here's all the information you need to reach me:



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Step Up To *The Open Mike* -- Subscribe!

The Open Mike is an electronic newsletter published monthly by Councilmember Michael J. Knapp (District 2). If you would like to be added to the electronic distribution list, please subscribe by registering at the web address below -- and be sure to indicate you'd like to subscribe to information on **District 2**.

<https://ext01.montgomerycountymd.gov/entp/s1p/esubpublic/newSubscriber.do>

County Council Public Hearings Calendar

Growth Policy, Rollingwood Under Consideration

Don't be shy! The County Council regularly holds public hearings at which we actively seek your input, thoughts, comments, and suggestions. The policies, amendments, and legislation under consideration aren't just pieces of paper; they have a very real impact on you and the lives of your fellow citizens. For this reason, residents are always encouraged to attend the public hearings and give us your views.

Hearings are held in the Council's main meeting room on the 7th Floor of the County Office Building at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville. ([Click here for a map.](#)) If you wish to testify on any of the items listed below, please call (240) 777-7931.

One more thing -- the hearing schedule can change rapidly, so always check the [County Council's home page](#) to get the most up-to-date information.

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
June 19	1:30 p.m.	Bill 8-07 : Capital Improvements Program - Bicycle and Pedestrian Impacts
	1:30 p.m.	Resolution to approve comprehensive revisions to the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings' Fee Schedule
	1:30 p.m.	Resolution to approve revisions to the Board of Appeals' Special Exception Filing Fees
	1:30 p.m.	Special appropriation to the MCPS FY2007 Capital Budget and amendment to the FY2007-2012 CIP: \$350,000 Improved (Safe) Access to Schools - Northwood High School
	8:00 p.m.	Annual Growth Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resolution to Approve comprehensive amendment to County Growth Policy - Resolution to amend impact tax rates - Bill 9-07: Growth Policy - Amendments - Bill 10-07: Impact Taxes - Amendments - Bill 11-07: Recordation Tax - Rate
June 26	7:30 p.m.	Annual Growth Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resolution to Approve comprehensive amendment to County Growth Policy - Resolution to amend impact tax rates - Bill 9-07: Growth Policy - Amendments - Bill 10-07: Impact Taxes - Amendments - Bill 11-07: Recordation Tax - Rate
July 10	1:30 p.m.	Subdivision Regulation Amendment 07-01 : Adequate Public Facilities - Validity Period
	7:30 p.m.	Resolution to approve Rollingwood Incorporation